

*The Outreach
in the Near East*

*Committee for the Near East of the
Division of Foreign Missions, NCCC*

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THE SETTING

Since the early Nineteenth Century, Protestant missions have given their witness in the Near East, primarily among the Christians of the Eastern Churches and among Muslims who form the dominant community and faith in the area. The formation of Israel has given the Jews a new significance for Christian missions. But the missionary purpose in relation to the two larger groups has reflected the influence of the political as well as the religious events of modern times. An estimated seven million Christians are distributed through the region bounding the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, and extending to Iran. The Evangelical community, which consists of some one hundred thousand adherents directly resulting from Protestant work, is related in different ways to the continuing organization and activity of Western missions. The particular missionary interest in the Evangelical Christian and the Muslim peoples derives from the developments of the past century of work among them, and the present ecumenical interest of the churches in many lands.

Protestant missions have been related to each other by sure but tenuous lines of communication. The vast areas, various cultures, different languages and peoples have left them little choice but to work in considerable independence. With the fellowship of a common missionary purpose, a certain amount of cooperation has been achieved among the missions and, in a more extensive form throughout the area, by means of the Near East Christian Council. The several regional councils have made some common planning and work possible. The Near East Christian Council itself has been almost entirely an agency of fellowship and report. United work among the missions is limited to a few institutions, and the United Mission in Iraq which combines the resources and effective functions of four American boards in that region. In the last decade independent Protestant groups have appeared with little or no concern for strengthening the solidarity of the Christian witness through established means. In some cases, their presence has resulted in fresh discord.

The Evangelical churches were formed largely from members of the Eastern churches, where a conviction concerning the Protestant witness was created by the teaching and preaching of the early missionaries. The present independence of these "Younger Churches" has come from the desire to make them self-reliant and to permit missions to witness and serve among Muslims more than formerly. Depending on the course of events in each country, and on decisions of missionary policy, a different relationship with Evangelical churches has been worked out.

MAJOR FACTORS

EVANGELICAL AND ORTHODOX CHURCH RELATIONS

A certain common interest and responsibility being found by the Evangelical and Orthodox churches, though only nascent, holds promise of increasing significance. The Christian Youth Leaders' Consultation at Beirut in 1955 indicated their meeting was the first that represented the several Orthodox, Evangelical and Anglican churches of the countries of the Middle East. The conviction was then expressed that it was necessary to break down "the isolation which has kept Christians from a full and effective common witness of their faith to the world." This ecumenical fact has had an important result. Where the "Younger Churches" have attained their largest membership and established most firmly the evangelical tradition, the movement of members into them has been from the Orthodox churches rather than from Islam. Growing ecumenical awareness makes continuation of this movement doubtful. Orthodox leaders react against what they consider to be "proselytism."* Nevertheless there continues a profound influence of Evangelical missions and churches upon Orthodox church members, and the character of their religious and social work. The new situation of awareness also provides a recognition that evangelical Christianity, where it has come into contact with the ancient churches, has succeeded in witnessing more effectively to Christians than to Muslims. In major areas the lack of effective communication of the Gospel to Muslims by Evangelical as well as Orthodox churches is related to the absence of any great hope among them for the conversion of the non-Christian.

*"Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches" (1956) is a provisional report dealing with the right and duty of free Christian witness on the one hand and the obligations of the ecumenical fellowship on the other.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

The achievement of independence, from Iraq in 1921 to the Sudan in 1956, and the pressure of Arab nationalism are forces that will, for years to come, influence the character of the Christian Mission and the outreach of the Christian Church. The Arab nation is not only a concept for national leaders who seek unity among those who have been preponderantly influenced by Arabian culture, it is a rallying cry for peoples once separated in their colonial past. Thus the new Egyptian Constitution declares:

“We, the Egyptian people, realizing that we form an organic part of a greater Arab entity, and aware of our responsibilities and obligations toward the common Arab struggle for the glory and honor of the Arab nation; . . .”

The Constitution also makes Islam the religion of the Egyptian State. Extensive indification of Islam with Arab nationality strengthens the resurgence of the religion, and gives it added significance for Christian work, as well as the security of the Christian Church. The effort to promote Islam is strengthened by political tensions in the Arab world where Western missions are confronted by the identification of Islam with the rising Arab power. The Christian churches come more and more under the necessity of understanding the reality of Islam and being concerned about the serious lack of their religious communication with Muslims. Combined with the intense pressure of national sentiments and political events is the aspiration for a better life for the masses. In several countries this has been decisively affected by the wealth that oil has brought. But there are deeper and more pervasive influences. Edward J. Jurji states, “Through church, school, hospital, printing press, and by dint of personal example, the bigotry and ignorance of a state society were slowly overcome . . . George Antonius, famed chronicler of the Arab awakening, was eminently right when he ascribed the modern Arab revival more to the influence of American education than to any other single factor . . . It was partly due, then, to the influence of Christianity in its Protestant form that the Middle East saw the dawn of a new era.” (The Middle East, Its Religion and Culture. pp. 119).

Nomadic desert dwellers have largely gathered in villages or migrated to cities where tribal loyalties are yielding to the more inclusive national spirit. Sheikhs are replaced by modern bureau-

crats. Cities grow with spectacular housing developments, modern universities and international air communications. Womanhood is given a new place in society, a position recognized in national life and constitutions. The pressure of population in some countries aggravates the existing poverty and illiteracy, and confronts new governments with a nearly overwhelming responsibility for the relief of the awakened masses. Through the new national existence the forces driving toward independence arouse the dormant needs of the people for education, literacy, health, and improved livelihood. Due to the people's fortified self-reliance, missions work under greater limitations than formerly but they provide services which both witness to Christian freedom and offer the means for attaining a wholesome democratic life.

THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Continually aggravated by international tension and the presence of nearly a million rebellious refugees, the conflict between the Arab nations and Israel has defied any political solution. The unsatisfied demands of the Arab Refugees have doubtless contributed to their continued social, economic and spiritual plight. Two international conferences on this refugee situation have been held under the sponsorship of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, in 1951 and 1956. The second of these was characterized by a greater urgency in view of the unsolved refugee problem, a more divided opinion on what should be done about it, and a conviction that the obligation of Christian agencies was for relief measures even greater than in the past.

While American mission boards related to the Near East Committee have no work in Israel, the plight of certain Arab and Hebrew Christian groups in that country has come to the knowledge of the International Missionary Council and the Near East Committee. It is possible that some assistance can be given them, to ensure no further deterioration in their welfare, cut off as they are from normal relations with churches and missions in the neighboring countries, and from the major part of the Christian Council. The Near East Committee is seeking some communication with these Christian groups, and is interested in their affairs.

CHRISTIAN COOPERATION

Reorganization of the Near East Christian Council is a timely event for missions which for many years have maintained fellowship with each other through their common purpose, but with largely independent denominational means. Organized and designated "for missionary cooperation," the Council has, nevertheless, sought the membership of the Evangelical churches, and was joined in 1955 by the largest church synod in the area. While it is hoped that other Evangelical church bodies will follow, the Council's present concern is to make provision for membership by the Eastern churches also. This Christian cooperation reaches out for a more inclusive representation and is further strengthened by the Council's appointment of its first whole-time executive secretary. The means and the occasion for effective cooperation are thus provided on a scale never before possible. At this time, the Council can look back to the initial organization of the "Coordinating Committee on Christian Literature for Muslims" which followed the Muslim Work Conferences held during 1924 in the Near East under the auspices of the International Missionary Council. At that time, it was also decided to form a council for Northern Africa and Western Asia. In 1929 the Near East Christian Council was organized with a standing committee on literature, having within its purview the Muslim areas beyond the Near East. This concentration on the publication of Christian literature has amply demonstrated the value of organized cooperation having common objectives throughout the area, but with a large measure of freedom in regional planning. The Council has been most effective where it has undertaken tasks too great for its member bodies acting separately, such as literature and the Arab Refugee Relief programs. The increasing importance of the role of the Near East Committee in the United States must be seen in the light of these developments in the Near East. In the beginning the Committee was mainly a group of mission board executives and others interested in "Work Among Muslims." The primary concern was not at first with any area, but eventually responsibility for the Near East was accepted, maintaining at the same time an interest in Muslim work in other parts of the world. A group originally convened by the Committee to have a special interest in the Christian approach to Islam, later became the Christian Study Seminar on Islam. Its membership includes mission board representatives, teachers of Islamics and some former missionaries.

The Committee and its Seminar have dual functions, one being concerned mainly with program and planning, and the other with study. They jointly manifest the need of American church organizations for thinking and working together in consultation with the Near East Christian Council.

THE DIRECTION OF THE FUTURE

THE INDIGENOUS CHURCH

The peculiar problems attending the growth of an indigenous church which will continue the missionary purpose in a predominantly non-Christian environment, in the presence of ancient, well-established churches, confront both the missions and the Evangelical churches with important decisions. The life which is essential to the Church's missionary vision is not determined so much by its size, tradition, or ecclesiastical structure, as by the reality of its worship, and its movement and awareness of what is needed to make it an enlarging fellowship to all who come in Christian faith. One question being asked in some places is: "Must there be one local congregation for those who come from an ancient Christian heritage and another for converts from Islam?" While this tendency is evident in some areas, there is other evidence of congregations which include all who come without regard to origin. The answer will vary from place to place. In their work with the churches, the missions will work to the end that the Church may have its own life, witness and mission "related to the soil." At the same time, the missions hold their responsibility to the non-Christian world where they find many opportunities for service and for the distinctive witness which they are called to bring. There are places where their primary interest must be in the strengthening of the churches. Here the missionary will work in close relation with the church. In other places where conditions do not permit this, the mission's responsibility is to give itself completely to its service and message to the non-Christian community.

Leadership. The securing and training of leaders essential to the indigenous church are recognized needs. They constitute an imperative task of the highest priority, with one or two exceptions, in all countries of the Near East. While accepting the central importance of theological education for the Church's leadership, we

recognize there are reasons why young men do not offer themselves for the ministry in the Evangelical churches. Missions should take this situation as a responsibility for understanding and assistance. The ministers speak of the need for lay members to take part in fulfilling the Church's vocation in obedience to the Gospel. Individual lay people are already at work, but conscious direction and coordination are essential for drawing in the unused resources of the churches' membership. Conferences with a program particularly designed to challenge lay people with the necessity of active participation in the work of the Church may be held, largely with their own leadership and financial support. At this point also the growing awareness of the role of youth in the life of the Church assumes particular significance. In the boys' and girls' clubs, youth work, camps, summer conferences, and inter-confessional gatherings, this can become the focus of concern. Young Christians from the United States, who go to the Near East to learn and share, need to know in what way then can encourage this essential development.

The Evangelical church lay leadership in Iran has been trained in an annual School of Evangelism where three hundred persons have been prepared for participation in the work and witness of the Church.

The pastoral and evangelistic ministry of Evangelical churches is being trained in the theological seminaries in Cairo and Beirut, in the Bible Institute at Shemlan, and in institutes such as are provided in Iran. The Evangelical Seminary of the Synod of the Nile at Cairo is supported and staffed by that church with assistance from the United Presbyterian Mission. At the Near East School of Theology in Beirut the Congregational, Presbyterian (USA) and Anglican missions cooperate with faculty and finance.

The Churches in Relation. The rapid emergence of an ecumenical relationship among the various churches of the Near East constitutes a possibility for the mission of the Church in this area which has no historical parallel. The degree to which the opportunity will be taken by the leaders of the churches depends in part on the direction given to the consultations, training institutes, work conferences and youth camps now being held with increasing frequency. There are certain practical problems in the assignment of representation in a conference, the degree of concern expressed for the different confessional interests, and the understanding of

the situation by ecumenical representatives who visit the Near East. It is apparent that, due to cultural and ecclesiastical conditions, there exists no common basis for planning and activity acceptable to all, but thought has to be directed toward such a basis when the churches come together for a specific purpose. As the means are worked out by which a united objective is expressed and fulfilled, the real depth of the problem is revealed.

While missions should encourage this relationship in every possible way, their contribution is more especially required in assistance to the Evangelical churches that they may attain a real interdependence and unity. The leaders' conferences at Beirut and Basrah provided the occasion for exploring the possibility of a unity which does not yet exist in the churches, and a unity of purpose shared by them and missionaries alike, each recognizing the obligation of the other. This process should be continued to the point where it leads to the churches speaking to each other in faith, and responding together in obedience to a more visible unity. The participation of missionaries in the leaders' conferences is essential in order to have a full ecumenical significance and to secure their help in the life of the churches where it may be particularly needed.

The Missions and Related Churches. The relationship of the churches in the Near East to the mission organizations and institutions there and in the United States creates a problem that calls for thought and planning. The fact that the Evangelical churches and the associated missions have had so little integral relationship, confronts both with the necessity of some careful reassessment of their responsibility for the ongoing work which missionaries have thus far largely or entirely directed, and the mission boards supported. Present political trends confront both missions and churches with the necessity of making the maximum use of their resources, by establishing themselves as far as possible beyond the reach of anti-foreign reaction and the crippling restrictions of governments upon missionary life and activity. Where the Church does not in fact exist, though missionary work continues, the permanence of the Christian Mission becomes vulnerable to an unusual degree. But where the Church is organized, and can be brought to a place of responsibility, initiative and leadership, the next steps of the associated mission would seem to be clear.

The problem is difficult in an area where the congregations are small and few, the leadership scarce, and the Evangelical Church has little ecclesiastical structure. The tendency for missions in this situation has been to retain missionary and large institutional resources apart from the organized life of the churches and to maintain a separation of mission and church work. The main activity of missionaries has been in those functions of the mission that are indirectly related to the Church, resulting in the development of outstanding institutions but an inadequate leadership for the Church. This oversimplifies the complex of relationships and responsibilities, but it serves to point to the crucial need of dedicated and imaginative ministerial and lay leadership in the churches where these conditions prevail. The employment of the resources of missionary personnel, and planning and finance, should be considered in relation to this lack of church life, not only where leadership is not available, but where the desire to witness to Muslim faith is not found.

The policy of the mission boards has been to establish a form of partnership with their related churches as stated by one Board to be that of "helping to develop an increasingly self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating, ecumenically-minded groups of churches." The result has been to reduce the direct financial aid to the churches, and at the same time, to increase assistance indirectly by providing more broadly for the training of lay and ministerial leadership. This parallelism of mission and church has been an effective policy under certain conditions, as in Turkey, where the American Board has continued its assistance to the Armenian Evangelical Union by increasing its support of the Near East School of Theology. The American Presbyterian Mission in Syria and Lebanon, and the United Presbyterian Mission in Egypt are moving toward integration; the latter by reassessing its functions and relationships with the Evangelical Church, and seeking to establish a joint Board of Administration with an executive secretary.

These are matters of such general importance as to suggest to the Near East Committee that it consider them, keeping in view the differences in the several situations.

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS

Outstanding schools, colleges, universities and hospitals throughout the Near East bear testimony to a remarkable develop-

ment within the central stream of missionary work, or closely parallel to it. These have been major means not only of giving educational and medical services but also of bearing witness in personal ways to the meaning and purpose of the Christian life and fellowship. In some situations no other form of Christian witness by missionaries has been possible. Events in recent years have subjected educational and medical institutions to stresses that affect the freedom of their work, and in some cases, imperil their future as agencies of the Christian mission. These need to be considered in view of another factor: the possibility of securing responsibility in Evangelical church organizations for maintaining certain of the institutions as a part of the work of the Church.

In schools and colleges, the youth of the Near East have come under the influence of Christian moral and spiritual values, and an achievement in one form is reflected in the changing moral and social standards of the people, including the character of Islam itself. One of the primary motives in Christian education has been to provide a means of effective witness to the Christian truth and life. But the freedom to do so has been increasingly restricted, as in Iran, where the government has taken over education and in some other countries where Islamic instruction for Muslim students has to be provided by the institution. The question has arisen as to the point beyond which a Christian school or college could no longer function responsibly. Ways can be found to meet such situations, as at Aleppo College, where the study of Christian theological and historical subjects is brought into a course in philosophy. In view of developments, the close consultation of those responsible for Christian education in the area is advisable to keep policies directed by the best experience available.

Missionary medical services have also offered a means of Christian service and witness that in some cases have had no alternative. As a doctor has stated, "The method of procedure has been to work out from a base hospital and school and evangelistic station on the coast and gradually so to commend ourselves to the people that our presence inland is desired. This has been a slow method, but time has demonstrated its wisdom. Moreover, it is the only possible method." It will not detract from this earlier method to recognize the increasing medical services of governments and the growing number of local doctors.

Whatever the future of missionary medical work may be, the importance of raising certain questions at present will be recognized. Thus a mission board executive visiting the Near East enquired about the value of a certain large institution. Recognizing that it added "considerable prestige to the Christian cause," he found however, "the rather insistent question as to how an elaborate structure" such as this would contribute to the Christian Church. It was asked whether the continued erection of imposing buildings would aid the development of an indigenous Christian community. Apart from the local character of certain problems, the present purpose of medical institutions, their relation to the whole missionary outreach and to the organized church are matters of sufficient value to make them and others the basis for study and determination of policy and action.

Surveys. The increasing interest in the missionary situation of educational and medical work in the Near East should bring the Christian Council into a position of central significance. Surveys and studies are being conducted on a regional and denominational basis, such as the educational survey of the United Mission in Iraq which will determine the future emphasis in mission schools. Also there has recently been a church-mission survey which sought, among other objects, to reassess the relationship of mission institutions to the Evangelical Church. The formation of a Christian Medical Council related to the Near East Christian Council is a current possibility which should have value for the area as a whole. These and other steps point out the path of future cooperation, where an exchange of views leads to a firmer dependence on the Christian resources of the area as a whole, and where insights arise from the widest use of the experience of those who are concerned about the course of the Christian mission expressed in the Near East so largely through institutions.

Christian Witness to Muslims. After more than a hundred years of Christian witness in the Near East, the missionary today sees the necessity of bringing to the Muslim people what is distinctive in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The essence of the witness is in the positive yet humble conviction that the Christian has something of eternal worth to offer his fellow man. The fundamental concern carries with it the necessity of understanding Islam and communicating to it. This monolithic faith formidable in appearance but subject to change, challenges again the love, wisdom and resources of the Christian churches.

A concerted and sustained interest in understanding Islam has been the particular enterprise of the Near East Committee through its Seminar on Islam. Doubtless the nature of the religion and the Muslim resistance to the proclamation of the Christian Gospel partly accounts for it. Past methods of presenting the Christian faith in the presence of similar or related Muslim beliefs appear less relevant in the contemporary scene. This is due primarily to the need of going further into the reality of Islam, endeavoring to apprehend what it means to the Muslim himself. "For the Christian is the ambassador of a person-to-person relationship... He must surpass the limits of merely academic knowledge. More than the student, he must learn to be in some measure the participant. As the bearer of 'the Word made flesh,' he must strive to enter into the daily existence of the Muslims, as believers, adherents, and men." (Kenneth Cragg, "The Call of the Minaret" pp. 188-89.)

After generations of missionary work, the fewness of the converts and organized congregations from among Muslims has caused reflection on the methods used. Some people have questioned a strategy of missions that seems to overlook more fruitful areas in the world in order to continue in the Near East. Legal restrictions on evangelism and the right to change religious affiliation, as well as social hindrances to conversion, continue to exist in some countries. To which the missionary among Muslims is bound by his calling to reply, "It should be plain to mission boards and subscribing churches that the mission is not a calculus of success, but an obligation in love. Statistics do not make it, nor can they unmake it. Nor is it always a Christian thing to ask to know where we are going. It is not ours to see the full consequences or conditions of our duty... As long as Christ is Christ, and the Church knows both itself and Him, there will be a mission to Islam." (Cragg, *ibid.*, pp. 334-35.)

The present development of the Evangelical churches and their growing ecumenical relationships within and outside the area, recalls the missions to a primary concern for their work and witness among Muslims. But this is not the responsibility only of the missionary from other lands; it becomes more and more the obligation of the churches in the area, both "younger" and "older". The beginning of a missionary outreach is found in Egypt where the Synod of the Nile has sent one of its ministers to the Sudan, a project in which the Armenian Evangelical Union and the Synod of Syria and Lebanon have shown interest. The reaching out to local Muslims is

a duty primarily of Christian congregations. To bring home to Christian people the necessity of their witnessing to Muslim countrymen now becomes an urgent part of the missionary task where churches in the West seek to assist the churches of the Near East.

Strengthening Cooperation. The trends which these considerations have indicated lead to the conviction that the Christian task among the ecumenical organizations, the Protestant missions and churches, and the Orthodox churches, requires a deeper cooperation than now exists. It is needed among those who, whether in the Near East or abroad, seek to initiate plans for the benefit of Christian groups. Outside agencies desiring to pursue aims or projects should do so only after consultation with the Near East Christian Council. A more profound cooperation is also required among the various churches in the area. Their financial support of the Council itself should be commensurate with their participation in its affairs and the benefits they receive from it. A third means of strengthening the cooperative movement is to seek for the active support of the Protestant mission groups in the area that have thus far remained outside the Council's membership. As difficult as this objective may be, the nature of the situation allows no less a purpose than to attempt to draw them into this fellowship and work.

What then, should be the role of the Near East Committee? The Committee is asking that the Boards keep it informed of the matters on which its concerted thought may prove to be useful. It will be the responsibility of the secretaries to formulate the agenda of meetings so as to give the greatest attention to what is of the broadest interest. The participation of functional committee representatives should be especially at the point of raising issues, describing problems and contributing to solutions in their respective fields.

A question arises about the function of the Near East Committee in relation to the Eastern churches. Since the responsibility of the mission boards will continue to be primarily with the Evangelical churches, their relations with the Eastern churches will be mainly informal. Yet there is scope for exploring the means by which the missionary impulse and resources of American churches can be made available to the churches of the Near East where no channel of communication and assistance ordinarily exists. For itself the Near East office should be available to representatives

of the older churches of the East, and should consult with them. After the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches, an informal conference was held in which representatives of the Coptic Church and some members of the Near East Committee took part. Noting the awakening of a section of that Church, the conference asked what steps should be taken to bring about closer co-operation between Protestant and Coptic communities. It was recommended that an informal conference be held in the Near East where representatives of the mission boards could discuss ways and means of cooperation with Coptic leaders. The possibility of using qualified and dedicated Coptic doctors, nurses and teachers for the fulfillment of "our one mission" was also stated.

Since the Near East Committee is closely related to the Near East Christian Council, the two organizations must have effective coordination of interest and effort. In its reorganization the Council will need to have a responsible relationship with organizations, institutions and projects which are in any way being supported by the Area Committee, one of the Division of Foreign Missions Functional Committees, or an ecumenical organization having a special interest in the Near East. This has been illustrated in the course of planning for the Sunday School Curriculum Conference. Within the Council's structure, some unitary organization for Sunday Schools and Christian Education is essential, though this need not greatly affect the responsibility of the Bible Lands Union for Christian Education or the Sunday School Union of Egypt and the Sudan. Since a large part of the financial support of the organizations working in this situation is found outside the Near East, it is clear that for the sake of their initiative and responsibility, some responsible coordination should be secured within the Near East Christian Council. This becomes essential also for the effective participation of the Near East Committee and the World Council of Christian Education in plans for the curriculum.

The consideration of the foregoing questions, and the resulting proposals have made the Near East Committee ask itself what is the present purpose and nature of the Christian Mission in the Near East. While the distant objective of all who have a part in the work of missions is the same, the need of thinking together about the more immediate aims in the several situations has made itself felt in the Committee's discussion of this statement. This will become one of its continued concerns.

PROJECTS

Literature. As the level of education rises, the opportunities and needs for Christian literature increase day by day. At literature centers in Cairo, Istanbul, Beirut, Algiers and Teheran, full-time missionary and national workers are engaged in the production and distribution of books, pamphlets, tracts and magazines for Christian and non-Christian reading, principally in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Armenian. For a long time there has been a scarcity of books written especially with the Muslim in mind, but now an increased concern is being expressed, as in the "Fellowship of Christian Writers in the Near East." They have recently published two books especially for the Muslim world. Another group of Christian writers is publishing for new literates a kind of literature that opens up a new possibility in Egypt, through the Minia Literacy Project. In addition to the presentation of Biblical and doctrinal ideas, it is important now to consider how the Christian should speak on current issues, such as religious liberty, religious attitudes to Communism, and other matters of general social concern, in order to stimulate Christian and non-Christian thinking on these subjects. In Istanbul the literature group is engaged in a varied program, including books for children, which Turkish publishers are also taking up.

The importance of coordinating the plans for publication is emphasized by the work of the full time secretary in Cairo, who provides the link with the Near East Committee and the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature. In the past when there was no such coordination, a virtual breakdown in the Near East Council's literature work occurred.

To train editors and authors, and to provide the technical help that is essential to improve publication on all levels, short-term local "schools" should be offered in the several centers where there is a sufficient group to work under expert guidance. The requirements of a new Sunday School curriculum plan to make it even more essential that this training be available to the people who will do the writing for it. The Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature may be able to assist in such a project.

Literacy. The literacy team and center at Minia, Egypt, have demonstrated how effectively a trained group, using the total resources of literacy methods and materials can make a concerted attack on illiteracy in village life. The local churches have been

revived, nurtured, and strengthened Christian unity among Coptic and Evangelical Christians. The Christian witness implicit in this enterprise and the spirit that inspires it, offer exceptional opportunity for a penetrating and helpful entrance to the Muslim mind. As the purpose of the plan of village-wide literacy includes phases of community cooperation other than the teaching of those who cannot read, it is important that the social, economic and medical means of improving the village life be followed through to the place where the people accept responsibility for them.

The consequences of the Minia plans lead to two immediate objectives. In the first place, some responsibility for continuing this literacy work needs to be taken by the Evangelical and Orthodox churches at large, whose local communities benefit by them. Secondly, the experience at Minia not only justifies wider recognition in Muslim lands, but it requires some integration into the structure of the Near East Christian Council in order that its concern be acknowledged by all Christian groups, and workers may share with it their problems, needs and accomplishments.

Arab Refugee Relief. The relief and rehabilitation work of the Near East Christian Council in four countries and the Gaza strip is the most extensive of its activities. The finance and personnel involved are many times greater than in other departments. As an instance of cooperation, the Relief Committee and allied Christian agencies from other countries have provided an outstanding achievement in the presence of an urgent need. The share of the Committee's requirements, which are a responsibility of American churches and voluntary organizations and are channeled through Church World Service, calls for continued response until a solution of the problem has been achieved.

The Joint Committee on Arab Refugees (Division of Foreign Missions, Church World Service and the Department of International Affairs) has been dissolved and a Committee on Middle East Refugees has been appointed by the National Council of Churches. An effort is being made to acquaint the American churches with the plight of the Arab Refugees, and the Christian responsibility for working toward justice and love in the area of conflict. This is in pursuance of the statement and recommendations of the Second Conference on the Arab Refugees at Beirut in 1956. The mission boards working in the area around Palestine are assisting in the provision of a staff person to work for a limited period for the

Middle East Refugees Committee.

Theological Education. The physical facilities of the seminaries at Beirut and Cairo may be found adequate for the present, but the crucial need for trained ministry supported by the churches, suggests the value of a study of the whole field of theological education in the Near East. This would take account of, and make recommendations concerning the present facilities among Orthodox as well as Evangelical churches, and the possibility of some co-operation among them. It would also consider the extent to which theological education is at present meeting the spiritual, moral and social situations in the Christian communities and the relation of the seminaries to the churches whose leaders they train. Assistance of the International Missionary Council might be requested in undertaking such a study through the Near East Christian Council. The participation of an experienced person from Southern Asia would prove valuable, in view of the developments in theological education there.

The exchange of experience among the churches of Asia and Africa would be beneficial to the Evangelical churches in the Near East. The International Missionary Council is prepared to assist this strengthening of Younger Church leadership and the Joint Office for Southern Asia and the Near East can help by arranging for leaders from Southern Asia to visit the Near East in their travels to and from the United States.

Christian Study Center for Islam. To give the Christian witness more personally and effectively to Muslims in the Near East, Dr. Kenneth Cragg has begun the first stage of what has been called the Christian Study Center for Islam. Actually, there is as yet no center, but it is anticipated there will be local "schools" where the available resources of people, teaching and libraries can be utilized. Dr. Cragg is visiting various areas of Christian work seeking to stimulate awareness of Islam and broaching constructively the Christian basis of relationship to non-Christian faith and folk.

Having helped to initiate and provide support for this venture, the mission boards will be obliged to consult the concerns and insights of this endeavor, not only to reach an assessment of the Muslim situation, but to reassess their work in the light of it. The missionary outreach should, accordingly, become more informed and vital.

Sunday School Curriculum. The need for a graded Sunday School curriculum among the Arabic, Armenian and Persian Evangelical churches has been apparent for years. Agreement on a general plan was at first difficult; problems were presented in theological and Biblical understanding, in practical arrangements for the visit of the consultant to guide church leaders, and in securing the necessary finance. The differences of doctrine and ecclesiastical practice have made it impossible to secure the participation of any of the Orthodox churches to the extent that they will use the curriculum once it is produced. Yet the interest and presence at the conference is expected of those who represent the Sunday School and Youth work of the Coptic and Greek Orthodox churches.

Financial support and the personnel to write and produce the curriculum materials must be found for a period of several years. The present interest in the plan and the degree of consultation already achieved give promise of the coöperation that will be necessary to prepare the books of a unified curriculum for the Near East.

In 1956 a conference on Christian Home and Family Life in the Near East was held in Lebanon under the sponsorship of the International Missionary Council. To initiate a continuing program under the Near East Christian Council, it is desirable that a committee be formed which will be responsible for encouraging and directing a plan of home and family activity for the churches.

The possibility of establishing a Christian Broadcasting Station in the area served by the Near East Christian Council has been explored and supported by representatives of the Council and RAVEMCCO. The Near East Committee has asked for a plan and estimates of what will be required in personnel and finance to set up and operate a station. The fullest possible support of the churches and missions in the area is essential if this broadcasting station is to be provided. A project of such magnitude and value may well require vigilant preparations for a long time.

In 1955 two Bible Correspondence Courses designed primarily for non-Christians were launched in Iran. The producers hold that the courses have great promise in lands where religious liberty is limited, and many non-Christians fear to be seen in the Christian churches. By this simple method, an interest in Bible study is created and a way opened into some minds that cannot otherwise be reached. The wider use of the Bible correspondence method may well be explored in other countries after which those who have

gained experience might meet for consultation and joint planning under the auspices of the Near East Christian Council.

Although the mission boards at present represented on the Near East Committee have no work in Israel, some assistance for Christian institutions and projects there is being secured in the United States for the first time through the joint efforts of the International Missionary Council and the Near East Committee. Plans for further coordinated help will be worked out, keeping in consultation with the Near East Christian Council.

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